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ABSTRACT

This paper provides activities and suggestions for foreign language teachers to use to enhance their students' self-esteem. Teachers should: (1) have students speak, write, and read the target language on the first day of class; (2) help students overcome test anxiety by focusing on what they did right, experimenting with different testing techniques, and allowing students to retake tests; (3) involve students in course planning; (4) teach for success by rewarding good performance; (5) teach students to set goals; (6) encourage teamwork and camaraderie by using classroom games and contests to build language skills; and (7) encourage student presentations and speeches to build self-confidence and speaking skill. General self-esteem tips for both teachers and students are also included. (MDM)

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SELF-ESTEEM IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM:
ACTIVITIES THAT DO MORE THAN TEACH

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PREFACE

This project has its origins not so much in my interest in self-esteem, but as taking information I received through a district-wide inservice and using it to investigate applications in my particular field of foreign language education. Since many activities intended to enhance self-esteem are based on exercises in communication, I decided that this field should yield a wealth of activites to be used in the foreign language classroom. If they help students to feel better about themselves, in addition to providing practice in the target language, so much the better!

SELF-ESTEEM BEGINS ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

I ask my students to speak French the very first MINUTE of the first day of class and respond "ici" as I call their names with a French accent. When we're done, I ask them what they think "ici" means and they respond "here." Then I say, "Don't ever tell me that you can't speak French because you just did. And don't tell me that you can't understand French because you understood "ici" perfectly. Then, I ask them to write it down, and we get some hilarious results. Even so, I tell them, "Don't ever tell me that you can't write French, because you just did." The same can be done with reading. Hand them a list of cognates or near-cognates, and watch them go!

Then, we talk about mistakes. I tell them that language learners make thousands of mistakes, and that if they spelled "ici" wrong, then they're well on their way to learning the language.

Whenever they are feeling a little bit "low," I ask them: "What language do you think the stupidest person in France speaks?" (Some days, they answer 'English.') "Are you smarter than the stupidest person in France? Yes!!! So, don't tell me that you can't learn this language."

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FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

On the very first day of class, have your students take out a piece of paper and write down every thing they know about the language or culture they plan to study, have them sign it and date it. You keep the paper. Periodically, pull it out and have students list what they at that point know about the language and the culture. The list will grow, and grow, even for your least talented student.

Also, after a particularly difficult exercise ask them, "Could you have done that on August 26th? (first day of school)" "Could you have done that last week?" "Could you have done that yesterday?" These records give students a real feeling of accomplishment.

The same can be done with video and audio cassettes, as tangible evidence of what a student can do, beyond a paper and pencil test score.

TESTING ANXIETY

Have you ever had a student who was a whizz in your class day after day, only to see him or her bomb on the test?
Encourage your students in the following ways:

1. Read through the directions together. I encourage them to make notes on the margins if they need them to remember.
2. Provide students with two blank 5x7 cards. They can use them to block out other sections of the test and only concentrate on one item at a time. (This idea from Barb Maitland, Cedar Rapids Jefferson H.S., IA)
3. Do not staple tests before they are taken. Language is redundant and I train students to look for spellings or other information elsewhere on the test.
4. I believe in bonuses. Did you ever study hard for a test, only to find that the items you spent all your time on did not appear on the test? I ask the students to list things that they have learned from that chapter that were not covered on the test. This is also a message to my student that I value his own, personal learning.
5. Insist that there is no prize for finishing first. I have often given a prize for finishing last. I make sure to mark "silly mistake" on tests when one is made, to show students that their hasty technique is at fault, not their learning.
6. I always allow students to re-take a test, and I split the difference with them. If Sally scores 20 the first time and 30 the second time, her score in the grade book will be 25. Why punish kids for learning? I

learned more from items I got wrong on tests than I ever did from most textbooks. Many of my students appreciate this policy and me for having it.

7. I have also tried relaxation techniques for students, with varying degrees of success. Deep breathing techniques, (breathe in through the nose for a count of 8, breathe out throuh the mouth for a count of eight) funny items or cartoons on tests, using kids' names on the test items, and "worst scenario" all can help to some extent.

8. Why not experiment with testing techniques? I often tell kids that I'm trying something new and I need their insight. We did that with "bingo" testing. I gave the kids a grid with 24 blanks and one "free space." They picked the numbers they wanted to put in the blanks, I gave them vocabulary expressions and they filled in the blanks. They hated it and we've never used it again in that class, but who's to say that another class won't love it?

AND FOR DAILY WORK....

What's wrong for giving a student 5 points for having his/her assignment done on a particular day? I do it.

When you do correct, don't use red ink.

Focus on one item to score, and let the other mistakes go!

Often, I have students check their own work before they hand it in, by going over specifically what they need to have. Then, if they correct it themselves, they are rewarded by not having to "pay for" their mistakes with a lower grade.

INVOLVE YOUR STUDENTS IN PLANNING

Research shows that students learn best when they feel ownership in a class and its material. Some techniquee which will help you achieve this:

1. Offer kids choices. I always ask them if they'd like the test Monday or Tuesday. Why not? I just make sure that I only give them choices that I can live with.

2. Make them the teachers. This is especially effective on review days, and I also use it when re-teaching material. Whenever a student asks for help, I also ask the rest of the class to help first. Study buddies, in which strong students are paired with less-able ones can also be effective. I used them for an entire unit, and even let them take a test together. Why not?

3. Elia Zechiel, from Hartford, Michigan, used this idea during foreign language week. The students in her classes created a series of games

that could be understood and played by nonSpanish students, such as Bingo, vocabulary musical chairs, etc. Each student could invite one guest to attend during a study hall or from another class with the teacher's permission.

4. One of our most successful activities was a student's idea: my French III class wrote and produced two plays based on fairy tales that they performed for K-2 classes. The small ones outpoured admiration for the "big kids," and left my class glowing for weeks.

5. Elizabeth Meiberg, Spanish teacher from Southeast Iowa, has a wonderful classroom management technique. Students have rotating duties: Student A has to pick up homework when it's due, B has to hand back papers, C has to write down what each day's work is in a notebook kept for the class, D has to present a Spanish recipe that week, E takes attendance, and so on. If you have large classes, split up the class and rotate so that every member of the class is responsible at least once a month for something.

TEACH FOR SUCCESS

A teacher I admire and respect told me, "I believe in good grades," and at first, I took that to mean that she was one of those "pushover" teachers. But as I thought about it, I realized that she was right. Foreign languages are not games that only a few, elite people can play! The more success a student has, the more likely s/he will feel good about the subject and the more likely s/he is to continue. "Too many teachers forget to give children credit for the things they did right, rather than focusing on X-ing what they did wrong....Kids need authentic feedback, not praise for walking across the room without falling over." (NEWSWEEK. (17 February 1992), p. 49)

TEACH YOUR STUDENTS HOW TO SET GOALS

Don't assume that your students know how to set goals. Don't assume that they've been taught. Don't assume that they <u>remember</u> even if they have been taught. Discuss goal-setting the first week of class. Have students write down their goal for the week on a 3 x 5 card that they carry with them. Under the goal, have them write down 3 specific actions that they will take to reach that goal, and **when they will take that action.** Ask them to review the goal at the beginning of each class period. After one week, have them write down whether or not they've reached that goal, and <u>why or why not.</u> If they make their goal, be sure to congratulate them, and encourage them to aim just a little higher next

week. If they haven't, make sure to schedule a chat with them to ask them what they plan to do differently in order to reach that goal the next week. **THIS IS NOT A WASTE OF YOUR "VALUABLE TEACHING TIME."** Ask yourself which is more important twenty years from now: that your student learned how to set and reach goals from you, or that he or she can still conjugate "s'asseoir" in 6 different tenses. Once the newness of the class wears off, you may wish to have your students establish quarterly rather than weekly goals.

TEAMWORK

Games that kids can play with the support of others take the pressure off individuals, and can help even the weakest student be a winner on a regular basis. One word of **caution: Don't let kids pick teams. It's devastating to be the last one chosen.**

1. AU SECOURS: Split the class into two teams. Individuals from each side go to the board and list as many items as they can in a given category for 1 minute. When the teacher calls out "Au Secours" (help), each side may help their teammate with answers. At the end of 30 seconds, one point is given for each correct answer on each side. So what if the score is 1,000 to 1,012?

2. DUEL: Given a category, two teams "duel" each other by mentioning items in that category. Teacher as referee calls out first term she hears. When one team runs out of choices, the other team must provide one more answer to score, otherwise, it's a draw. This can also promote good listening, since students cannot repeat a previous accepted answer and therefore must keep track in their heads of what's been said.

3. POST-ITS: Buy a block of post-its with several colors. Give each team its own color and one magic marker. Members take turns labelling items in the classroom. Score by first disposing of the labels with errors then counting the number of each color. This works best when students are given a strict time limit, such as 5 minutes. Leave successful answers posted to remind students of the mark they've made in class.

4. CHARIVARI: On an overhead, make two lists of scrambled vocabulary words. Expose a word for 5 seconds. If the team can decipher, it earns 2 pts. Give them 5 more seconds if they need it and they earn 1 point. If, after 10 seconds, they haven't figured it out, let the other team

"steal" the word for 1 pt.

5. BODY OF EVIDENCE: Borrow a roll of paper and cut off 6 1/2 ft. lengths. Let students outline the bodies of students; you will need at least two. Give each team a different colored marker and taking turns, have them label body parts. Score by giving correct answers of each color one point. This works best if you leave the "bodies" on the floor in the front of the room, unless you have lots of "uninterrupted" wall on which to tape the outlines.

6. BASKETBALL: My wildest class behaves like angels in order to be allowed to play basketball. They prepare the review questions and then divide into teams. Arrange the chairs so that each opponent is equidistant from the wastebasket, which is the "bucket." If the student answers the question correctly, s/he may shoot for two, or pass to a teammate who is closer for one. If certain chairs are farther away, you may have 3-point shots. The "ref" (you, of course) can call a "t" if someone is naughty and let the other team shoot free throws. You can use a big paperwad, aluminum foil or a nerf ball for the ball. Be sure to line your wastebasket with clean newspaper so kids won't mind handling the ball. By the way, have the other team "rebound" so that you don't wear yourself out.

7. SHOP TILL YA DROP: Linda Wilson, of Winfield-Mt. Union High School, IA, taught me this one. Ask students to bring in large pictures of food and paste them onto construction paper. Then, attach them to a bulletin board or chalk board. Place two chairs with their backs to the board and send one member from each team to the chairs. Each student is given a ruler or a pointer. The teachers says, "Oh, I'd like some _____" and the students try to be the first to point to that item with their rulers. My students understand that there is to be no physical contact between them, and that if the pictures are hurt by too vigorous play, the game stops.

8. ZUT ALORS! Have vocab on strips of paper in a box. For every eight words, write Zut alors! (Aye Caramba) If a student gets the answer, the strip is his. If he draws Zut Alors, all his strips go back into the box. This way, even a slow student can win. (Thanx to Shirley Linder, Pekin High School, IA, for passing this idea to me)

PRESENTATIONS

Studies show that many people fear speaking in front of groups more than they fear death! You can help your students overcome this fear by getting them up and in front of the class often and early. Be sure to review with them **beforehand** what makes successful presenting. It only takes one or two successful experiences before you've got your hands full trying to **keep** them from taking over!!

1. THE VERY FIRST TIME A STUDENT MUST SPEAK IN FRONT OF THE GROUP,
   a. make it a paired, directed, impromptu dialog. We do this the 3rd day of class. Students must greet each other, ask how they are, and take leave.
   b. be lavish in your praise. Find something good for every student.
   c. judge on only one or two criteria, so that everyone who even tries can score highly.
   d. make only **vital** corrections, make them to the group as a whole, and **never** interrupt a student to make a correction. If you feel a student could benefit from more specific correction, write down your comments to share.

2. ENCOURAGE OR REQUIRE STUDENTS TO HAVE PROPS. It's a security blanket. Why not? When we learn family members, the students present their **family tree.** They are allowed to make up and/or delete family members. They may draw, cut out pictures from magazines, or use actual photographs. With the students' permission, I post their family trees on the bulletin board. When we do **weather terms,** the students have a map and/or symbols for weather in an actual country, or one that they invent. I post the maps afterwards. When learning to **tell time,** the students' assignment is to bring a paper plate to class. I provide the brad and the "hands," they make their "clock" and have one to manipulate for listening and for speaking.
In French II, students are ready to do weekly "**show and tell.**" They bring whatever they want to class, and talk about it, preparing ahead of time. I encourage them to use only things they know how to say and I award bonus points for vocabulary and structures currently being studied. Older students can **fill a bag** with things that represent them, then talk about the items they chose and why it's representative of them.
When learning **parts of the house,** students can draw or bring pictures and take the class on a tour of their home. These may be actual or

imagined. If the students know future, that's added practice..."My house will be _____."
To practice **imperfect,** have students bring in their baby pictures and talk about what they were like when they were young. If a student has no baby pictures, have the class brainstorm what they can use instead. You can provide a prop for this one by taking pictures of students from time to time. Slides work especially well for this because then students can do the presentation as a group while looking at the slide.

3. ALWAYS MODEL WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM THE STUDENTS. Make your model attainable for everyone in the class. Also, suggest ways that students can go above and beyond the call of duty if they choose.

OTHER LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES:

1. COAT OF ARMS: I learned this activity from Dr. Michael Oates, UNI. Let each student create a coat of arms which represents himself. He then presents it to the class in the target language.

2. TELEGRAM: Have your students compose a telegram to anyone in the world, stating, "I advise that..." "I urge that...." "It is necessary that..." They express their opinions and practice grammatical structures at the same time. Use an actual telegram form for an added kick.

3. METAPHORS: Have students describe themselves using metaphors: "If I were a _____, I'd be a _____, because I'm _____." (If I were a **car,** I'd be a **Cadillac,** because I'm the best.) You can also use formula sentences to practice imperfect. "I used to be _____, but now I'm _____."
(I used to be ignorant, but now I'm worldly-wise.)
NOTE: When we learn adjectives, I have students describe themselves. If they write anything negative about themselves, I cross it out with a red pen and when I hand the paper back, I always point it out and say, "It's not nice to lie to your French teacher. I don't think you're fat (stupid, ugly, etc), and I am always right."

4. ANOTHER WAY TO PRACTICE IMPERFECT VS. PAST: One of my classes was having a horrible time with this until I figured out a way to make it concrete. I gave them a length of yarn when they came to class. This represented their lifeline (imperfect). They then wrote events from their lives on strips of paper (passe compose), which they then attached to the

yarn. We posted these "lifelines" around the room. In another class, I gave them a series of translations. Each imperfect clause was written on a shocking green strip, and each passe compose clause was written on a shocking pink strip. After I okayed their strips, they stapled the pink strip at an angle to the green strip and posted the correct sentence on the wall. (Kind of like technicolor diagramming of sentences.)

5. MORE IMPERFECTION: Have students draw a picture of something they accomplished at a young age and write their age then at the side of the picture. They can talk about this to the class and practice the difference between imperfect and past tenses. This also is a good listening activity if you have other students summarize what was said.

6. LIVING IN THE PAST: As soon as students learn a past tense, they can tell you every Monday what they did over the weekend. You can vary this by playing "To Tell the Truth." Three students leave the room and determine who will "lie." They then come in, tell the class what they did over the weekend, and the class must decide who is lying. Once you know their habits, you can make a bingo grid ahead of time. In each square, list an activity (e.g., "went shopping") and have students complete it with their classmates' names. Reward good listeners. Students love to hear what each other did over the weekend, you will get to know your students better, and they will appreciate you for listening to them.

7. TAKE TIME AT THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD for students to state what they did particularly well that day, week, month. If some students are shy, let them write it down and hand it to you on a slip of paper. Congratulate students for their efforts.

GENERAL TIPS TO ENHANCE SELF-ESTEEM

1. SHOW YOUR STUDENTS THAT YOU VALUE THEM. If you didn't have these kids in your class, you wouldn't have a class. Foreign language is not required in most schools. Post good papers, pictures of them, newspaper articles about them and things that they make for class. Encourage them to take their work home and show off. (One student told me that her mom didn't post things on the fridge anymore because her little sister took up all the space. During conferences, I asked that mom to buy a bigger refrigerator, kiddingly of course!) Consider making a "Who's Who in French I " , etc. book. Each student contributes a page about himself. This becomes part of the permanent class library for generations to en-

joy!

2. SHOW YOUR STUDENTS' PARENTS THAT YOU VALUE THEM. Parents can be your biggest nightmare, or your biggest asset. This year, I sent a letter home with my students and required that they bring back a signed paper that at least one parent had read the letter. In the letter, I stated my expectations for the course, and ways that the parents could help their student at home, even if the parent was monolingual. I also thanked them for sending me such awesome students! I have a folder full of positive comments back; parents praised me for taking the time to write, and so on. My school year started off with a bang!

3. THANK YOUR STUDENTS, OFTEN AND SINCERELY. I buy packs of cheap thank-you cards (10 for $1 at Dollar General Stores). I make a point of writing one or two every few days. I thank kids for their effort, their behavior, for helping others, for making my job easier, and so on. I also send thank-you's to parents, substitutes, administrators, and colleagues. H.T. Webster, the newspaper cartoonist, once sent telegrams to twenty acquaintances chosen at random. The telegrams contained one word: "Congratulations!" Each person took the telegram as a matter of course and wrote thank-you letters back. Not one questioned why the telegram was sent.

4. RECOGNIZE ACHIEVEMENT. Inspired by Greg LeMond's last victory in the Tour de France, I invented "Le Tour de Francais." I post in my room the achiever for each "étape" or week on a piece of paper which represents the maillot jaune. Kids who don't have top grades can earn one for effort, or citizenship, or volunteering. If every week is a little much, you can have a Student of the Month. I used to have two of these every month: Academic and Citizenship. I also post our honor roll and call attention to it.

5. HAVE CONSULTANTS. When a student does particularly well in an area, s/he becomes the Consultant for that area. For example, if Sara scores highest on the Cities of France civ test, I will recognize that by saying, "If you need to know anything about French cities, ask Sara."

6. EXPERT ADVICE: Early in the year, I have students explain the reasons for their success, and post a quote from each one. You can also have older students compile advice sheets for students at lower levels which explain learning tips or techniques that the students have developed.

7. HAVE CONTACT WITH EACH STUDENT EVERY DAY. I shake my students' hands 'hello' and 'good-bye.' It's the French thing to do, and it affirms them as human beings. Sad enough to say, for some kids, your friendly greeting may be the **only one they have all day.** Shaking hands is also a "safe" contact in an age when we must all be very careful.

8. WHEN THINGS ARE GOING BADLY: It happens to everyone. If you come to the end of your rope, try....

a. a smile break
b. an applause break (for someone feeling miserable)
c. a laugh break

Explain to students that they have exactly one minute to smile, laugh, applaud, whatever. Then, go back to that difficult item, or leave it, go on to something else and come back later.

8. OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES: If some students are having a difficult time with a concept, turn the ball over to a student who <u>does</u> understand and have him or her explain it. Or, if a particular student is stuck, ask the rest of the class to give him/her a hint.

9. SUCCESS FOR <u>EVERYONE</u>: Never call on a weak student first. Let several other students model correctly first. You can also "plant" information by letting a slow student in on an answer before class. Only you and that student need ever know that s/he had a little help beforehand.

10. LET YOUR STUDENTS HELP **YOU**: I always ask for students' opinions on how things are going. Students will take this seriously and knowing that their opinions are valued, they give good advice. You can ignore cheap shots, or you can tell them why put-downs don't help you. Some of my best activities were developed with the help of my students. For example, I read in a magazine that one family exchanges Christmas presents by drawing names and getting to choose from a grab bag. They then argue back and forth as to who gets what. I threw this idea out to my French III class who was working on the possessives "Il/elle est à moi, à toi" and "C'est le/la mien/ne", etc. Each student then brought some things to class that he could bear to part with permanently. We sat in a circle with our "gifts" in front of us. They ranged from candy bars and pencils to a packet of Cup-a-Soup (OK,OK, so I forgot my homework!) I then drew slips of paper with each student's name from a bag. When

a student's name was drawn, he could take one "gift" from one student and give it to someone else, saying, "This is yours/hers/his," and take one gift for himself, saying, "This is mine." We agreed before starting that at the end of exactly twenty minutes what was in front of you was yours to keep. Students also suggested that if the student drawn made a grammatical mistake that the transaction was null and void, and likewise for speaking English, no matter how stressful the situation got. (Their idea, not mine) We all had sideaches from laughing so hard because items quickly became desirable and undesirable and were verbally fought over. Not only that, but students averaged 95% correct on that section of the chapter test, much higher than their usual performance. I suggest not more than ten students in a group, in case you want to do this with a large class.

SELF ESTEEM FOR TEACHERS

Teachers are not immune to poor self esteem, because if that were true, we would have no teachers who were alcoholics, no teachers who killed themselves, no teachers who gossiped or backstabbed (and I know **every** school has *at least* one of those!), no teachers who were killjoys (eek!), no teachers who took the joy out of learning for their students. **We would have no teachers who allowed themselves to get burnt out.**

Yet, despite our best efforts, our self esteem can be eroded by any number of things that are or seem to be beyond our control, such as:

- -Lack of support from administration, community or other colleagues
- -Lack of proper funding, which results in inadequate materials, over-crowded classrooms, superhuman teaching loads, poor salaries
- -Events in our personal lives totally unrelated to our jobs

What to do?

1. HAVE A LIFE TOTALLY AWAY FROM SCHOOL. I used to spend my entire weekend working on things for school. No more. Saturdays are mine and mine alone. If I must work on school work, I do essentials only (such as lesson plans) on Sunday evening.
2. NO ONE PERSON CAN DO EVERY THING. In the classroom or in your home, some things will just have to wait. If you like a clean house but don't have time to clean it, hire a parttime housekeeper. If you can't

afford a professional, hire a needy high school student.

3. NO GUILT TRIPS. Time that you spend on yourself makes you a better prson. If you are a better person, you will be a better teacher. The next time you feel like loafing, DO IT. Tell yourself, "This is for my students.

4. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. A good teacher is a healthy teacher, mentally and physically.

5. ASK YOURSELF, "WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?" Picture a worst scenario, then discuss with yourself or someone close options for dealing with that scenario. "They'll fire me?" "Good, then I can collect unemployment for awhile and relax." Ask yourself, "Will this really matter twenty (ten, five, one) years from now?"

6. DON'T DO ANYTHING YOURSELF THAT A STUDENT CAN DO FOR YOU. That includes correcting homework, doing bulletin boards, making teaching aids, developing games and so on.

7. LEARN TO SAY "NO." Many schools "reward" their good teachers with the most difficult students, and extra little projects that no one else will do, but that's because they "trust you to do a good job." I just recently learned a good trick. **Always ask for a budget.** If they learn that you need money to get things done, they might find to find a cheaper solution. Just so you don't get left out, pick out 1 or 2 things that you'd really like to do and volunteer at the beginning of the year.

8. IT'S OK TO ASK FOR HELP. I once was given a study hall with 85 behaviorally challenged students, none of whose names I knew. I went straight to the principal and asked for his help. I said, "I need your help to meet the standards that I have for myself and for these students." By the next day, the study hall was split with another teacher who had two free periods. The principal did not view me as weak, but as a professional.

9. ALWAYS BE A PROFESSIONAL. Never gossip or backstab. Stay away from negative colleagues. Volunteer positive comments on students' performance. Congratulate others. Sometimes, your kind words are the only ones they'll hear all week (sad to say.) **Let your self-esteem grow from recognizing the good in others. A person stands taller with another on his shoulders.** Along with professional, participate in your professional organizations. It's a way to recharge.

10. CULTIVATE ALLIES. Especially in small schools, the foreign language teacher is a one-of-a-kind, with no one else in the department. That has its advantages---you're always the Department Head! Get to know parents before you have any problems with their children. Share goodies with all staff. The way to be appreciated is to appreciate.

IN CLOSING

Every day in the local paper, I read about people in the business world receiving plaques, awards, and trophies for their accomplishments. The tangible awards in our profession are very rare indeed. Yet, when we think about the success of others, we need to remember that:

Behind every successful person were many great TEACHERS!!!!!!

and also, each of us needs to remember that:

I'm the <u>best</u> teacher I know, because I'm the teacher I know <u>the best</u> !!!!!!!